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## BOOK REVIEWS AND NOTICES

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*The Life of Lord Strathcona and Mount Royal.* By BECKLES WILLSON. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1915. 2 vols., 8vo, pp. xl+543; 533. \$6.50 net.

*The Life and Times of Lord Strathcona.* By W. T. R. PRESTON. Toronto: McClelland, Goodchild & Stewart. 8vo, pp. 324. \$2.00.

A famous English reviewer has premised that there are three requisites for great biographies. The biography must deal with a great man; there must be material of a special kind and value; and the biography must be the work of a writer with the biographical faculty. The first two conditions are so amply fulfilled in the case of the late Lord Strathcona (Donald A. Smith) that the reader of his official *Life* recognizes with genuine regret that the author lacks the biographical faculty. The two handsome, sumptuously printed volumes are a disappointment. Mr. Willson appears to have been submerged by his material, for he does not subjugate it to his purpose. The book is weighted down with multitudinous letters, quotations from speeches, and documents the cogency of which is not always apparent. On examination, these *disjecta* in too many instances seem of insufficient significance to warrant inclusion in a first-rate study. Further, the author fails to take Carlyle's advice "to abstain from and leave in oblivion much that is true." For instance, though it is natural that in his later years, as a colonial Maecenas, as the representative of Canada in London, as a man who had borne a stirring part in the development of Canada, Lord Strathcona's venerable figure should win considerable admiration and respect, still the most patient reader wearies of the details of a succession of highly colored incidents of which the following is a fair sample:

Welcoming banners hung across the leading thoroughfares—thousands daily waited to catch merely a glimpse of the white hair and benignant features of the object of their adoration. Bevy of maidens waited on him with flowers. At the banquets and public receptions his appearance was hailed by deafening cheers, followed by a wonderful silence when he opened his lips to speak. His lightest word was received as sanctified incense. Every movement—nay, almost every gesture of the patriarchal figure was chronicled in the newspapers. Day succeeded day, and still the populace of Winnipeg did not tire of acclaiming, "Strathcona!"

In this case the biographer fails to mention the truly illuminating fact that before Strathcona left Winnipeg he was asked for a subscription of \$1,000,000 toward the Selkirk Exhibition.

Lord Strathcona's career falls naturally into three broad divisions: his years as a Labrador trader for the Hudson's Bay Company which began in 1838 when he was eighteen, and continued until 1868; the years between 1868 and 1896, when he was one of the most prominent financial magnates, enterprisers, and public men in the Dominion; and the final years of the Canadian High Commissionership in London, from 1896 until 1914. Of these three periods that between 1868 and 1896 is quite the most important. During these years the future noble lord laid the foundation of the enormous fortune which enabled him to become a patron of higher education, an entertainer of royalty and a connoisseur of family crests. At the same time he excited bitterer animosity and provoked more conflicting judgments than any other man in Canadian public life.

In these years Lord Strathcona had a large part in every important Canadian enterprise. He sprang into prominence on being sent in 1871 as a commissioner to settle the grievances of the half-breeds of Manitoba. Thereafter, as head of the Hudson's Bay Company, as a joint purchaser, with others of the St. Paul and Pacific Railway, as a member of the C.P.R. syndicate, and as president of the Bank of Montreal, he was easily, until his death, the most considerable financial figure in the Dominion. There is no evidence, however, that as a member of parliament he ever used his seat for any other purpose than to promote the material interests of himself and his fellow-entrepreneurs. Nor is much light thrown by Mr. Willson on three incidents of cardinal importance in estimating Strathcona's character, to wit: the alleged use for his own purposes of money entrusted to him for investment by officers of the Hudson's Bay Company; the purchase of the St. Paul and Pacific Railway from a receiver, alleged to have been a fraud on the Dutch bondholders; and the charge that he "double-crossed" John A. McDonald's government in connection with the Pacific Railway scandals, because he had hopes of arranging a deal with the Liberal party. The biography is inconclusive and ineffective in disposing of these ugly charges. The author does not sufficiently elucidate these possibly devious turns in Strathcona's career and their influence upon the building up of his fortune. As a matter of fact, throughout the two volumes the economic and pecuniary results of his activity are barely mentioned. They are assumed rather than made explicit.

But the suggestions of unscrupulous manipulation already adverted to, even if true, are insufficient to account for his success. In spite of any defects of character Strathcona may have possessed, the economist who wades through these volumes cannot but be impressed by the due economic rewards that follow saving and foresight. In his early years, on a wage of two shillings a day, he saved one shilling. While yet a Labrador trader, he saw the possibilities of sub-arctic farming and developed a fine farm at his northern trading-post. This in itself had much to do with lifting him out of the ruck of the company's traders and marking him for promotion. The enterprise drew the attention of Markham and other arctic explorers and made his name known in London. Enterprise and foresight too led him also to invest his savings in Bank of Montreal stock at a time when colonial banking institutions were still held suspect by most colonial investors. The same qualities led him to secure for the Hudson's Bay Company, still reluctant to turn from fur trading, vast tracts of virgin land in the Canadian Northwest, though it was then considered almost without value, and forthwith to realize on these investments through the development of adequate railway systems. The foresight, enterprise, and skill displayed in the successful accomplishment of these vast projects compel admiration and lay a solid economic foundation, in the rewards of entrepreneurship, for his later wealth.

The gift of sagacious prevision did not desert him when he was appointed to represent Canada in London. Indeed, he is credited by the late John Hay with being one of four men responsible for modern British imperialism. Certainly if Mr. Willson's record of his speeches on Canada is at all correct, he must have been a most effective press agent. Of course, his princely donations, his lavish entertainments, his respect for rank and royalty, while they kept Canada to the front, were not wholly disinterested, but paved the way for his title. In this respect there is more than a suggestion even in Mr. Willson's study that Strathcona's later years, to a remarkable degree, exemplify Veblen's theory of the leisure class and his law of conspicuous consumption.

This suggestion receives force and pointedness when one turns to W. T. R. Preston's study of the dead peer. Mr. Preston, after serving a long apprenticeship in the Canadian newspaper and political world, received a political reward in the shape of an appointment as commissioner of immigration in London. He was thus, throughout the years of Strathcona's public life, in close contact with him, and in the later years especially. If he was not exactly Strathcona's valet, yet he has

succeeded wonderfully well in achieving the valet's traditional point of view. Mr. Preston has written a sparkling, brilliant study that in fascination and interest can scarcely be surpassed. But it cannot stand as a serious presentation; the bitter animus is too evident. Lord Strathcona is too consistently represented as a supremely self-centered man, who lives, moves, and has his being in his own personal advancement, never delicate as to the means he takes to achieve his ends, but exploiting to the extent of his ability the resources of the young Dominion.

Undoubtedly Lord Strathcona had a very highly developed pecuniary instinct, and he lived in the years when the natural idea of progress was exploitation; but the persistent emphasis on this aspect of his activity, the persistent suppression of or the nasty construction placed upon every seemingly worthy deed performed by Strathcona, makes the book seem fundamentally untrue. Mr. Preston has given a strikingly, indeed, extremely Veblenesque interpretation of Strathcona's life. Mr. Willson's official biography, coming later, has failed to answer it, and in some degree seems to confirm it.

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*Current Economic Problems: A Series of Studies in the Control of Industrial Development.* Edited by WALTON HALE HAMILTON. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1915. 8vo, xxxix + 789. \$2.75.

This is a very difficult book to characterize. The selections of which it is made up are uniformly short, many of them consisting of single paragraphs or parts of paragraphs, and practically all of them "adapted" by the editor. They are also from numerous and variegated sources. The first difficulty is to find a somewhat more descriptive title than the one which appears on the title-page. "Gleanings from Freakdom" would scarcely do, because many of the authors quoted are men of recognized scientific standing. "Variegated Economics" would answer the purpose fairly well, except for the fact that it would have to be explained. "Magazine Economics" would also do, except for the fact that many of the selections are from books rather than newspapers and magazines. The volume contains samples of almost every variety of wisdom and unwisdom, of serious statements of fact and smart demagoguery, of economic sense and economic nonsense.